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Hon. A. Lawrence's correspondence
with Hon. D. Webster on cheap
ocean postage.

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HON. ABBOTT LAWRENCE'S CORRESPONDENCE
WITH THE HON. DANIEL WEBSTER, ON
CHEAP OCEAN POSTAGE.

To the Friends of Cheap Ocean Postage, throughout the United States.

Your attention is now called to the necessity of reducing the rates of ocean postage, which have long been felt an intolerable burden by all who have correspondence with the Old World. The important Document now placed before you shows that it has occupied the attention of distinguished minds in Europe, and has been the subject of diplomatic correspondence between the Government and our late minister to the Court of St. James. Mr. Lawrence, in his letter to Mr. Webster, has shown that he understands and feels the importance of cheap ocean postage, and his facts and arguments are worthy of the attentive consideration of all classes, and especially of those who have the power to remedy the evil complained of.

Let us look at the rates of postage now imposed on letters between the United States and Great Britain. The postage on a single letter sent in a Mail steamer is *twenty-four cents*; if it weighs over half an ounce and under an ounce, *forty-eight cents*; and should it weigh the smallest fraction over an ounce, it will be charged *ninety-six cents*! A letter, if conveyed by a sailing vessel to Great Britain, will cost *sixteen cents*, and when brought from thence to the United States, the postage is *twenty-two cents*! Hence little is gained by sending letters in sailing vessels; for by either conveyance the postage is enormous. But this is not the only tax. On the continent of Europe there is an additional *in-land* postage, varying according to the rates exacted by the different governments, so that a letter sent to, or from France or Germany, before it arrives at its place of destination, is liable to two or three additional postages. By a recent treaty with Prussia, the postage to that kingdom has been fixed at *thirty cents*, which is at least six times more than it should be. The postage to France *via* England, is enormous. The charge on a letter weighing half an ounce, between Dover and Calais, two ports within sight of

each other, is thirty-one cents ! which added to the charge from New York to Liverpool is *fifty-five cents*.

The freight charged for carrying letters, compared with other articles of value, is exorbitant. The Liverpool mail steamers carry goods for *thirty-seven dollars and fifty cents* per ton, while a ton of letters, at the rate of twenty-four cents the half ounce, pays the enormous sum of *fifteen thousand three hundred and sixty dollars* ! and yet no more care is required for bags of letters than for boxes and bales of silks or calicoes. Our finest packet ships will carry a barrel of flour to Liverpool, weighing two hundred pounds, for *forty-five or fifty cents*, but two hundred pounds of letters by the same ship will be charged *ten hundred and twenty-four dollars* ! Even at the rate of two cents postage, the freight paid will be *twelve hundred and eighty dollars* per ton, a sum vastly disproportioned to that charged on other articles of freight.

According to recent information the number of transatlantic letters conveyed by Steamers and sailing vessels, during the past year, was about *four and a half millions*, and the postage collected on them, nearly *one million of dollars*. One-fourth of these were mercantile or business letters, the other three-fourths were letters of friendship. Here then we see that a tax of *three-quarters of a million of dollars* is levied on the exercise of the social affections, and paid principally by the most indigent classes of our country. It now costs a poor laboring man nearly the price of a day's work to send a letter and receive an answer to it, from his friends in Europe !

Let us contrast the difference between *inland and ocean* postage. In Great Britain a letter is conveyed to any part of the United Kingdom for *two cents*, and in the United States any distance under three thousand miles for *three cents*, but a letter, carried three thousand miles by water, from one country to the other, is charged *twenty-four cents*, and if it weighs a fraction over an ounce it must pay quadruple this rate, or *ninety-six cents* !

The object of this circular is to place before you these facts, which are sufficient to awaken your attention to the necessity of reducing the rates of ocean postage. The advantages that would result from a reduction to *two cents* are incalculable. No one can fully estimate the religious, moral, literary, commercial, national benefits, which would follow the adoption of this rate of postage, and, in view of this, the Christian, the philanthropist, the statesman and merchant should co-operate in the accomplishment of this all-important measure.

The question is, what can be done to effect this object ? I answer :

1. Prepare a petition and get your immediate friends and neighbors to sign it. Any person who can write is competent to prepare a petition, couched in respectful terms, asking Congress to reduce the rates of ocean postage to two cents.

2. When the petition is signed by all you can obtain, both male and female, old and young, because all sexes and ages are interested in cheap postage, then send it by mail to Washington, addressed to the member of Congress from your district, or to either of the Senators from your State, requesting him to present it immediately to Congress.

3. If practicable, call a public meeting in your town or village, and adopt resolutions requesting your representatives and senators in Congress to use their influence to obtain a reduction of the rates of ocean postage.

4. Those who are acquainted with Senators and members of Congress should address them by letter, soliciting their aid in promoting this important measure.

5. Endeavor to obtain the aid of the press in your neighborhood, that all-powerful engine which moves and directs public opinion, to advocate cheap ocean postage. If the press will speak out boldly and fearlessly in this cause, our legislators in Congress will not turn a deaf ear to its voice.

6. The influence of the clergy of every denomination should be exercised in favor of this cause, but especially those who are closely connected with our adopted citizens and the millions of emigrants, who are now coming to make this country their home. They have left behind them hundreds of thousands of relatives and friends, anxious to hear of their welfare, but the present high rates of postage, and their limited circumstances, prevent them from enjoying this pleasure. Encourage the getting up of meetings and petitions to Congress, in favor of cheap ocean postage, for in doing this you will be instrumental of good, and the widow and fatherless, and the stranger in the land, will rise up and call you blessed.

I am aware that some persons will object to the rate of *two cents*, as being so low that it will not pay the expense of carrying the mails in ocean steamers. To this I would reply, that while the transit of a letter by water shall be charged *two cents*, I propose to add the inland postage to it, whatever that rate may be. Hence, according to our present rates, a letter to Great Britain from the United States, under three thousand miles, would be charged *five cents*, and over that distance *eight cents*.

To yield a revenue equal to what is now collected, would require the number of letters to be increased about *four-fold*, and that this increase would speedily take place, if the proposed reduction was made, may be proved by the following facts :

1. There are in the United States not less than *seven millions* of persons who have relations, friends and correspondents in the Old World, and yet the number of letters has remained nearly stationary at *four and a half millions*, notwithstanding the vast number of emigrants who have arrived here every year. Why is this ? Because the high rate of postage is a barrier to correspondence. Reduce it as proposed, and where one letter is now written, there will be at least *three*.

2. Again, this high rate causes hundreds of thousands of letters to be sent by passengers, which, if the postage was cheap, would be sent by the mails. There would then be no inducement to seek any other mode of conveyance.

3. Should the postage be reduced the practice of writing on thin paper and enclosing several letters in one envelope, would in a good degree cease. They would be sent directly to their address through the post office, instead of being enclosed to correspondents for delivery.

I hope not to be charged with exaggeration, when I say that, in less than four years, the number of transatlantic letters, instead of remaining at four and a half millions, as they have done for several years past, will be increased at least to *twenty millions*, which at five and eight cents will yield an amount of revenue equal to what is now collected from ocean postage. Let the experiment be tried, and, I am persuaded, it will prove as successful as it has on inland postage.

The limits of this communication will not allow me to enlarge upon the necessity and advantages of the proposed reduction. My object is to place before you a few facts to demonstrate the importance of this change, and to urge you to adopt active measures to accomplish it.

Respectfully yours,

BARNABAS BATES.

MESSAGE

FROM THE

PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES,

COMMUNICATING,

In compliance with a resolution of the Senate, information in relation to foreign postal arrangements, and especially cheap ocean postage.

AUGUST 31, 1852.—Referred to the Committee on the Post Office and Post Roads, and ordered to be printed.

To the Senate of the United States :

In answer to the resolution of the Senate of the 21st instant, requesting information in respect to foreign postal arrangements, and especially cheap ocean postage, I transmit a report of the Secretary of State, and the documents by which it was accompanied.

MILLARD FILLMORE.

WASHINGTON, August 31, 1852.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE,
Washington, August 30, 1852.

The Secretary of State, to whom was referred the resolution of the Senate of the 21st instant, requesting the President "to furnish to the Senate copies of any correspondence, not heretofore communicated to Congress, between the Department of State and the diplomatic agents of the United States abroad, with regard to foreign postal arrangements, and especially cheap ocean postage, so far as the same can be done without detriment to the public interests," has the honor to lay before the President an extract from a despatch of the 24th of October, and a copy of one of the 7th of May last, addressed to this department by the minister of the United States at London.

Respectfully submitted.

DANIEL WEBSTER.

The PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES.

[No. 181.]

LEGATION OF THE UNITED STATES,
London, May 7, 1852.

SIR: I have had the honor to address you on several occasions on the subject of our postal arrangements, and to transmit my correspondence with this government relative to the rate charged for

the transit of postal matter in closed bags through England to France. In my despatch No. 134, of the 24th of October last, and in some others of a subsequent date, and in private letters to the Postmaster General, I expressed the opinion that the postal rates between the United States and the United Kingdom were too high, and should be reduced. About four-tenths of the postage between the two countries is paid in Ireland, and the ratio is steadily increasing, in consequence of the large Irish population in the United States, and the emigration still going forward. The revenue derived from this branch of the postal service is no longer principally of a commercial character, but is obtained to a large extent from the correspondence of the most indigent classes of society. The tax falls mainly upon the adopted citizens of the United States, or upon those who have sought our shores with the expectation of becoming citizens.

The present ocean rate for letters is heavy, and very disproportionate to the low inland rates adopted, both in the United States and the United Kingdom. It is a great impediment in the way of the free correspondence so important to the moral and material interests of the United States.

I am unable to understand why a half-ounce letter should be transported three thousand miles in the United States (often in coaches, wagons, or on the backs of horses) at a charge of three cents, or to any part of the United Kingdom at a charge of two cents; while the rate for transporting the same letter by ship (much the cheapest mode of conveyance known) the same distance across the ocean, is sixteen cents. I have thought, in view of the great advantages enjoyed under our system of cheap postage in the United States, and the long and happy experience in this country of the workings of a similar system, that the present time might not be deemed unfavorable for proposing to extend it to the ocean. I had supposed that probably this would not be considered a financial question by the government of the United States, but one of a deeper interest to the people. Considering the vast extent of our country, the character of its inhabitants, its constitution, its laws, its free institutions, and the great and growing numbers of British-born persons among us, cheap postage between the two countries must produce the most beneficial results. We have much to gain and nothing to lose by adopting it. Our security for the preservation of our popular institutions rests upon the enlightenment of the people and the extension of knowledge. Perhaps nothing does more to diffuse that knowledge than the constant correspondence which takes place among the people of the United States; and were it extended to these islands, a corresponding advantage would be gained, as well as a broader foundation laid for the maintenance of amicable and happy relations between the two governments.

After our experience in the great increase of correspondence consequent upon the reduction of the inland rates of postage, there cannot, I think, be much doubt that a corresponding increase would take place, were a reduction made in the sea-rates between this country and the United States. It would seem that the treasury of the United States is in a condition to try this experiment—if it be an experiment. During the first two or three years, perhaps

some aid from the treasury will be required. But it seems to me that the amount which may be temporarily necessary, will be of small importance compared with the immense benefits to result from it.

If anything is to be done immediately in this matter, the example must be set in the United States.

I think that the great body of the people of this country are in favor of the system; but I have some doubt whether the government will not view the question entirely in a financial light, and be unwilling to make any sacrifice. They maintain a steam navy, in part by their high ocean postal rates, to almost every part of the globe. During the great Exhibition of 1851, an association was formed for the purpose of promoting a cheap and uniform system of international postage for letters and printed papers; and a large committee was appointed, which has had the subject under consideration. A few days since several of those gentlemen called upon me, as a deputation from the general committee, for the purpose of discussing the question. Lord Ashburton is the chairman of the general committee, and was to have been the chairman of the deputation, but was prevented from attending by illness. The deputation consisted of Sir John Boileau, Bart.; Sir John Burgoyne, K. C. B.; William Brown, esq., M. P.; H. Cole, esq.; and several other gentlemen of high character and standing. They stated that the system of cheap oceanic postage must begin in the United States; that when commenced it would, in their judgment, be adopted here from necessity, as, in case of refusal on the part of this government, all the correspondence between the two countries would be transmitted by American vessels—since no government, in the present state of opinion, would probably wish to renew the severe measures pursued towards the Washington—and that their efforts would now be given to effecting a cheap international postage between the United Kingdom and the United States.

I will not dwell further upon this subject, but close with expressing the hope that at the present session of Congress the question may be brought before it; and that, in its wisdom, it may adopt such a measure as will conduce to the best interests of our country.

I have the honor to be, sir, very respectfully, your obedient servant,

ABBOTT LAWRENCE.

HON. DANIEL WEBSTER,

Secretary of State, Washington, D. C.

LEGATION OF THE UNITED STATES,
London, October 24, 1851.

SIR :

* * * * *

Our continental correspondence, already very great, is daily increasing, by the continued emigration from Germany and other continental States. The correspondence between the United States and the United Kingdom also, particularly with Ireland, has become of vast importance to the citizens of the United States, and is likely to go on increasing for many years to come. In view of these facts, I respectfully suggest that it would be expedient and

just to effect a large reduction in the ocean postage between the two countries.

I have the honor to be, sir, very respectfully, your obedient servant,

ABBOTT LAWRENCE.

Hon. DANIEL WEBSTER,

Secretary of State, Washington, D. C.

The following is a copy of a petition :

To the Honorable, the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States, in Congress assembled. The Undersigned, inhabitants of the County of _____ and State of _____ respectfully ask of your honorable body, to reduce the present burdensome rates of ocean postage to a uniform rate of *two cents pre-paid*, for every half ounce, to which may be added the inland postage as now required by law.

Abbott Lawrence

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